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New York

President:	Mr. Wittig	(Germany)
Members:	Azerbaijan	Mr. Mehdiyev
	China	Mr. Tian Lin
	Colombia	Mr. Osorio
	France	Mr. Araud
	Guatemala	Mr. Rosenthal
	India	Mr. Kumar
	Morocco	Mr. Loulichki
	Pakistan	Mr. Ahmad
	Portugal	Mr. Moraes Cabral
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	South Africa	Mr. Sangqu
	Togo	Mr. Menan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Mark Lyall Grant
	United States of America	Ms. Rice

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: Under rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Serry.

Mr. Serry: Before beginning the briefing, let me mark that today is the Jewish holiday Rosh Hashanah. I wish to congratulate our Israeli colleagues and to wish them a happy new year.

Turning now to the briefing, it is nearly one year since the Secretary-General forwarded the Palestinian application for membership of the United Nations to the Council. At the same time, the Quartet set a framework for resumed dialogue, reaffirming that the only sustainable solution to the conflict was a negotiated one. Despite some positive and quiet engagement, the parties have not yet engaged in meaningful dialogue on the core issues. More recently, following his meeting with the Foreign Ministers of States members of the League of Arab States in Cairo on 5 September, President Abbas expressed his intention to commence preparations to pursue an upgrade in the status at the United Nations through the General Assembly.

Today, amid a fiscal crisis and related social unrest in the West Bank, the stakes are growing. The main obstacles remain political: unresolved issues between the parties, the continued occupation and the ongoing Palestinian division. However, we can no longer simply count on the pursuit of short-term and mutual confidence-building measures aimed at starting talks. Such measures are not alternatives to a negotiated peace.

The lack of progress on the political track and the ongoing conflict and occupation put at risk the very viability of the two-State solution. There is no more sobering a manifestation of such a risk than the financial and economic crisis currently afflicting the Palestinian Authority.

Starting on 4 September, thousands of Palestinian demonstrators in the West Bank took to the streets to protest the increase in value added tax (VAT), recent rises in the price of fuel and most basic commodities, and the deferred payment of August Government salaries. Unions and taxi and truck drivers repeatedly blocked city centres and joined the protesters. One protester, who set himself on fire in Ramallah, remains in serious condition. Attempts by another two protesters, including one with his child, were thwarted.

Although the Palestinian security forces handled the protests with professionalism and restraint, the demonstrations turned violent on 10 September and dozens were injured in clashes. The situation in Gaza also became tense when a teenager died on 2 September after he torched himself to death to protest his family's poor living conditions.

The Government of Prime Minister Fayyad announced an emergency economic package on 11 September, including a reduction of the VAT to 15 per cent and a return to pre-September prices for diesel and gas. Such measures will provide temporary relief to the average Palestinian, who bears the brunt of this crisis. Absent a predictable and immediate injection of funds, the Palestinian Authority will be unable to meet its recurrent financial requirements, which amount to less than $1 billion. Such a mounting fiscal crisis would paralyse the institutions of the Palestinian Authority.

In a few days the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC), meeting in New York, will offer a sober account of the Palestinian Authority's very grave fiscal situation. Despite Prime Minister Fayyad's commendable efforts, he is confronted with the effects of a decrease in foreign aid, the failure of donor countries to fulfil their financial pledges, and slowing economic activity. As our report to the AHLC will highlight, such a slowdown is dampening hopes of reducing the high unemployment, poverty and vulnerability that still affect thousands of Palestinians. Against that background and as an immediate step to ensure the Palestinian Authority's fiscal viability in the short term, we urgently call on donors, in particular from the region, to increase their contributions and provide the much-needed funds to bridge, in a timely manner, the current gap.

The Israeli Government is also called upon to do more to alleviate the Palestinian Authority's burden and provide a much-needed economic impetus in the medium term. On 11 September, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced the transfer, in advance, of 225 million new shekels in tax money it collects for the Palestinians. This is welcome, and we encourage Israel to take further steps in that direction. Greater facilitation by the Israeli Government, in particular by easing restrictions to allow for the private sector to develop, would contribute to stimulating economic activity and addressing the Palestinian Authority's fiscal sustainability in the medium term.

Developments on the ground also do not support efforts to overcome the political stalemate. Settlement activity continued during the reporting period. On 9 September, the Israeli Government endorsed an Israeli higher-education committee decision to upgrade the status of a college in the settlement of Ariel to that of a university. While it is pending final approval, that decision would lead to a further encroachment into the West Bank. On 11 September, Israeli authorities reportedly issued orders to confiscate some 1,500 dunams of land near Nablus. On 2 September, the outpost of Migron was evacuated following a High Court ruling and its approximately 50 families moved to another settlement nearby. The United Nations position remains that settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, whether on private land or elsewhere, is contrary to international law and should be brought to a halt.

Several vehicles were vandalized, and a monastery in Latrun and a mosque near Hebron were desecrated on 4 and 11 September, respectively, as part of so-called price-tag activities following the evacuation of Migron. Thirty-five incidents involving settler violence resulted in injuries to 15 Palestinians as well as extensive property damage.

Palestinians were attacked in Jerusalem on 5 and 7 September, and Israeli police have actively pursued the attackers. We note the Israeli Government's consistent condemnation of such attacks. Israeli police also arrested settler youth in connection with the 16 August Molotov cocktail attack near Hebron. Yet we continue to urge the Israeli authorities to act decisively against acts of violence perpetrated by Israeli citizens.

Palestinian violence against Israelis in the West Bank, mostly stone-throwing at vehicles, resulted in injuries to seven Israeli citizens as well as material damage. On 9 September, a Palestinian driver killed an Israeli security guard in a suspected deliberate hit-and-run accident near the barrier and the Oranit settlement.

Citing security concerns, the Israel Defense Forces conducted 247 operations in the occupied West Bank, in which 110 Palestinians were injured and 186 arrested. The majority of injuries and detentions took place during Palestinian demonstrations, including against the barrier, which deviates from the Green line in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (A/ES-10/273).

Much of the reported violence continues to occur in Area C, an area fundamental to the contiguity of the West Bank and the viability of a future Palestinian State. Palestinian access to and development of Area C is vital to accommodate the natural growth of the Palestinian population. Developing natural resources is also essential for the private sector to drive the economic growth needed for a rapidly growing population. Alongside the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other international partners, the United Nations has engaged the Israeli Government on a series of planning and social infrastructure projects in Area C. An additional package of 18 education and health projects for USAID has just been approved.

The United Nations remains concerned about the scale of ongoing demolitions, which in the reporting period included 11 residential structures. We note that there is an ongoing dialogue between the concerned vulnerable communities and the Government of Israel. While there are initial indications that plans for six to eight Palestinian communities may soon be approved, greater progress in addressing the needs of Palestinian communities in Area C is urgently required so as to adequately address the long-standing developmental needs of those communities.

Palestinian security forces have continued working to maintain law and order in the West Bank. On 5 September, a senior Palestinian Authority security commander was shot dead in Jenin, where extensive security operations have taken place since the death of its Governor in May. For the Palestinian Authority security forces to continue operating effectively, it is necessary that they receive a delivery of equipment that is currently awaiting approval for import.

On 13 September, the nineteenth anniversary of the Oslo agreement, all pre-Oslo Palestinian prisoners in

Israeli jails observed a one-day hunger strike protesting their continued imprisonment and in solidarity with other long-term hunger strikers. The Secretary-General remains concerned about the life-threatening condition of three of those hunger strikers, and calls for a swift resolution of their cases. On a positive note, visits of family members from Gaza to Palestinian detainees have continued on a weekly basis since they were resumed on 16 July with the facilitation of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The Palestinian Central Elections Commission continued preparations for local elections, which are scheduled to take place in the West Bank on 20 October. In accordance with the electoral law, the nomination period, which began on 1 September, concluded on 11 September. That constitutes an important benchmark, and we encourage the Palestinian Authority to conduct that poll as scheduled, with all necessary support extended to the Central Elections Commission. The last such elections were only partially held in 2005, and some municipal councils have not been voted into office since the 1970s.

In Gaza, the United Nations released a report entitled "Gaza 2020" on 27 August. The report highlighted the ever- greater stress that population growth in Gaza will place on the provision of clean water, electricity, health-care services and education, which are inadequate now and will not keep pace with the needs of a population that is projected to grow to 2.1 million people by 2020. The implications, if there is no change to the current untenable situation, should be a reason for alarm for all concerned. Alongside efforts to make progress on the peace process, we must all work to ensure that calm is realized, the Palestinian divide ends, and the closure regime is lifted.

In that sobering context, several weeks of calm were yet again interrupted on 26 and 31 August, when home-made rockets fired from Gaza hit the Israeli town of Sderot, causing damage to infrastructure. A Grad rocket fired at the Israeli town of Netivot on 9 August caused extensive material damage to a house without injuring residents. In total, 50 projectiles were fired from Gaza into Israel, including six Grad rockets and 17 mortar shells. Israeli forces conducted five incursions and 10 airstrikes into Gaza, resulting in six Palestinian militants killed, while four Palestinian militants and six civilians were also injured. Israeli strikes at tunnels also resulted in one Palestinian killed and one injured. We continue to condemn all indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel, which must stop. We also urge Israel to show maximum restraint.

Efforts to promote Palestinian reconciliation continue to face obstacles. At the meeting of the League of Arab States held on 5 September, President Abbas reiterated that general elections were the key to true reconciliation. For its part, Hamas reiterated that no polling should take place prior to reconciliation. On 2 September the de facto authorities in Gaza reshuffled the ruling Cabinet, but claimed that efforts towards Palestinian reconciliation would not be impacted.

A unified Palestinian polity is central to realizing a two-State solution. The Quartet has also been clear in stating that the situation in and around Gaza would remain unsustainable as long as the West Bank and Gaza are not reunited under a legitimate Palestinian Authority that adheres to the Palestine Liberation Organization's commitments. In this context, we welcome recent statements of support, also by the League of Arab States, for Egyptian facilitation efforts to bring the Palestinian factions back to the table.

Lifting the closure regime, in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009), and Gaza's recovery and long-term economic growth remain fundamental United Nations objectives. The long-term growth of Gaza's economy will depend on reactivating the productive private sector by allowing it to have easier access to necessary raw materials, capital inputs and its traditional markets, namely, the West Bank and Israel. Lifting restrictions on the entry of aggregate, iron bar and cement would not only enable the growth of the private sector, but also provide an additional source of revenue for the Palestinian Authority through taxation at the point of entry. In the meantime, a steady flow of approvals for works involving dual-use material should be maintained. We appreciate the ongoing cooperation with the Israeli authorities and we expect approval this week of an additional substantial package of United Nations projects, including housing, schools, shelters and solid waste treatment infrastructure.

Turning to the region, the situation in Syria remains of utmost concern to the Secretary-General. Mr. Brahimi is returning from Damascus and will report on his mission, so I will be extremely brief. As we are facing a grim spiral of violence, our objectives remain the same: to stop the bloodshed and human rights violations, to alleviate human suffering, and to seek a political solution through a Syrian-led process of

transition and dialogue. Tragically for millions of Syrian civilians, the violence and killing continue to mount as a result of a dangerous militarization of the conflict. Military operations have broadened, encompassing all major cities. Indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas by Government forces with heavy weapons, tanks and air assets has increased. Operations from the armed opposition have also intensified.

The month of August registered the highest number of casualties thus far, and that toll is growing. More than 2.5 million people, including refugees from Palestine and Iraq, now need assistance and protection inside Syria. As conditions deteriorate, we see dangerous implications for Syria's neighbours. United Nations agencies and their humanitarian partners are working tirelessly to deliver food and basic assistance to those in need in Syria, as well as to refugees across borders. They have been able to reach an increasing number of people, but more support from donors is needed to further increase capacities.

As regards the situation in the area of separation, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) has continued to liaise with Israeli and Syrian military authorities to prevent an escalation of tensions. UNDOF has, since 18 July, protested operations by Syrian security forces in the area of separation, which are in violation of the agreement on disengagement between Israeli and Syrian Forces. Among other measures, the Israel Defense Forces started three weeks ago to reinforce the technical fence, including through an advanced alert system along the Israeli-Syrian disengagement line. New roads have also been paved in several spots. Overall, while the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan has remained relatively stable in spite of continued settlement activity, no progress towards peace between the two countries can be expected while the conflict in Syria remains unresolved. A just and comprehensive peace in accordance with relevant resolutions remains, however, a critical objective for regional stability and an essential part of realizing the vision of the Arab Peace Initiative.

The situation on Lebanon's northern border remains tense, underscoring the need for continued vigilance internationally about the risk of further impact from the crisis in Syria. Of particular concern is the continued cross-border shelling from Syria into Lebanon, with seven confirmed incidents since 22 August, resulting in the injury of at least eight people. It is noteworthy in this context that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have performed robustly during this period, while the Government and political leaders have helped to calm the situation through responsible appeals for national unity. On 11 September, the LAF freed the last hostage kidnapped on 15 August, while on 8 September four Syrians and a Turkish national were freed in an operation in southern Beirut in which Government forces made several arrests in connection with the kidnapping. Following the release on 25 August of one of the Lebanese pilgrims kidnapped in Syria in May, 10 still remain in captivity

Although fragile, calm has also prevailed in Tripoli after the cessation of violence in the city and after the LAF arrested some 18 people on 26 August for their involvement in last month's clashes. The LAF also confiscated guns, ammunition and heavy weapons. Those successful operations serve to underscore the continued need for international support to the Lebanese Government and the LAF as they face increasing challenges as a result of the situation in Syria.

The next national dialogue session is planned for 20 September. International support for the continuation of that process is important, as it represents a key test of the commitment of all Lebanese parties to their country's stability and sovereignty against attempts to cause sectarian strife and draw Lebanon into regional events. Welcomed by leaders of all communities in Lebanon, Pope Benedict XVI further encouraged an atmosphere of calm and tolerance during his visit to Lebanon from 14 to 16 September.

The situation in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) area of operations remained cautiously calm and stable. UNIFIL maintained an enhanced presence across its area of operations as the LAF operated at lower strength due to the temporary redeployment of some units to cater to security requirements north of the Litani river. While Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis, there were also minor Lebanese ground violations of the Blue Line.

Those developments are taking place in a broader regional context, which, as we have seen, is rife with tensions — tensions that have recently led to disturbing episodes of violence in the region. In this challenging context, the Secretary-General has been clear that now is the time for all to work for calm and restraint, and strive to advance dialogue, mutual respect and understanding.

In conclusion, in a volatile and rapidly changing region, the vision of the two-State solution and the achievements of the Palestinian Authority are elements of stability and progress that should not be lost, but rather maintained and realized in full without further delay. For one, that means nothing short of the unequivocal support of the international community for the Palestinian Authority and collective intensified efforts to address the fiscal difficulties presently faced and preserve the institutional gains made to date. Israel also has a special responsibility and interest in ensuring the Palestinian Authority's viability. It is now even more important for the parties to further engage in positive steps, show restraint and refrain from provocative acts that risk inflaming an already delicate environment.

By the end of this year, yet another timeline set by the Quartet for reaching a comprehensive, negotiated settlement will have lapsed. In circumstances of prolonged political stalemate and an increasingly fragile situation on the ground, the time has come for the international community to seriously reassess its role in resolving the conflict. In that regard, the Secretary General sincerely hopes that Quartet partners, in consultation with the parties, will look beyond prescriptive timelines to chart a new credible political way ahead in the coming months. Both parties will suffer the consequences of failure to act responsibly and of sliding further away from the two-State solution and regional peace, as envisaged in the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The President: I thank Mr. Serry for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.